



Giffords: Stimulus will soften recession blow in Arizona

GARRY DUFFY
Tucson Citizen
February 27, 2009

The state's share of the federal economic stimulus package can help soften the blow of the recession that is touching almost everyone in Arizona, Rep. Gabrielle Giffords said Friday.

Giffords voted for the \$787 billion American Recovery and Reinvestment Act that will provide about \$4.2 billion for the state.

"I felt that bold action was needed," Giffords, D-Ariz., told the Tucson Citizen Editorial Board.

"This did not happen overnight and what is happening is very serious," the second-term member of Congress said.

The intent of the stimulus package is to save jobs and provide funds for infrastructure, health care, education and a host of programs that are endangered by the economy and budget cuts enacted by the Arizona Legislature to cope with a \$1.6 billion deficit.

The stimulus funding is different from bailout money approved for financial institutions and automakers in that the funds will provide benefits to average citizens who will feel the impacts of state budget cuts the most, Giffords said.

"We're passing money to the states so they don't have to cut their budgets" so drastically, Giffords said.

Job losses in the state will make health care coverage unaffordable for a growing number.

The stimulus package will provide 65 percent of premium costs for continuing health care insurance for those who have or will lose jobs.

The funding also will allow the state to extend unemployment benefits beyond the current 26-week maximum, Giffords said.

Giffords sponsored a series of science and energy forums around Tucson recently, including one on the potential for Arizona to become a solar energy capital.

"It's a God-given opportunity," Giffords said of the state's average of more than 300 sun-filled days per year.

Giffords said she supported President Obama's timetable to draw down U.S. troops from Iraq by August 2010.

The timetable doesn't include 30,000 to 50,000 troops that may remain longer.

Giffords, a member of the House Armed Services Committee, said her understanding is that all troops will be out of Iraq by the end of 2011.

The U.S. military and its allies could stay longer in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region because of the difficulty of combat in mountainous terrain, she said.